

## Chapter 1



*Sunset over the Rappahannock River*

# Purpose of and Need For Action

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## Introduction

The purposes for establishing the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge (refuge) are to conserve and protect fish and wildlife resources, including endangered and threatened species and wetlands. Refuge habitats include freshwater tidal marsh, forested swamp, upland deciduous forest, mixed pine forest, and managed grassland.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service, we, our) purchased the first tract of land for the refuge in 1996. By September 30, 2007, it comprised 7,711 acres. Within its 268,000-acre approved acquisition boundary (Service 1995), we are authorized to purchase up to 20,000 acres in conservation easement or fee title. That approved boundary lies on either side of the Rappahannock River, including parts of Lancaster, Middlesex, Richmond, Essex, Caroline, Westmoreland, and King George counties (see map 1.1).

This Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge (refuge) was prepared pursuant to the National Wildlife Refuge System Administrative Act of 1996, as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (16 U.S.C. 6688dd et seq.; Refuge Improvement Act). An environmental assessment (EA), required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), was prepared with the draft CCP.

This final CCP presents the combination of management goals, objectives, and strategies that we believe will best achieve our vision and goals for the refuge; contribute to the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System); achieve the refuge purposes; fulfill legal mandates; address key issues; incorporate sound principles of fish and wildlife management, and serve the American public. This CCP will guide management decisions and actions on the refuge over the next 15 years. It will also help us communicate our priorities to the Commonwealth of Virginia's natural resource agencies, our conservation partners, local communities, and the public.

Chapter 1, "The Purpose of and Need for Action," explains the purpose of and need for preparing a CCP, and sets the stage for four subsequent chapters and eight appendixes. Specifically, chapter 1:

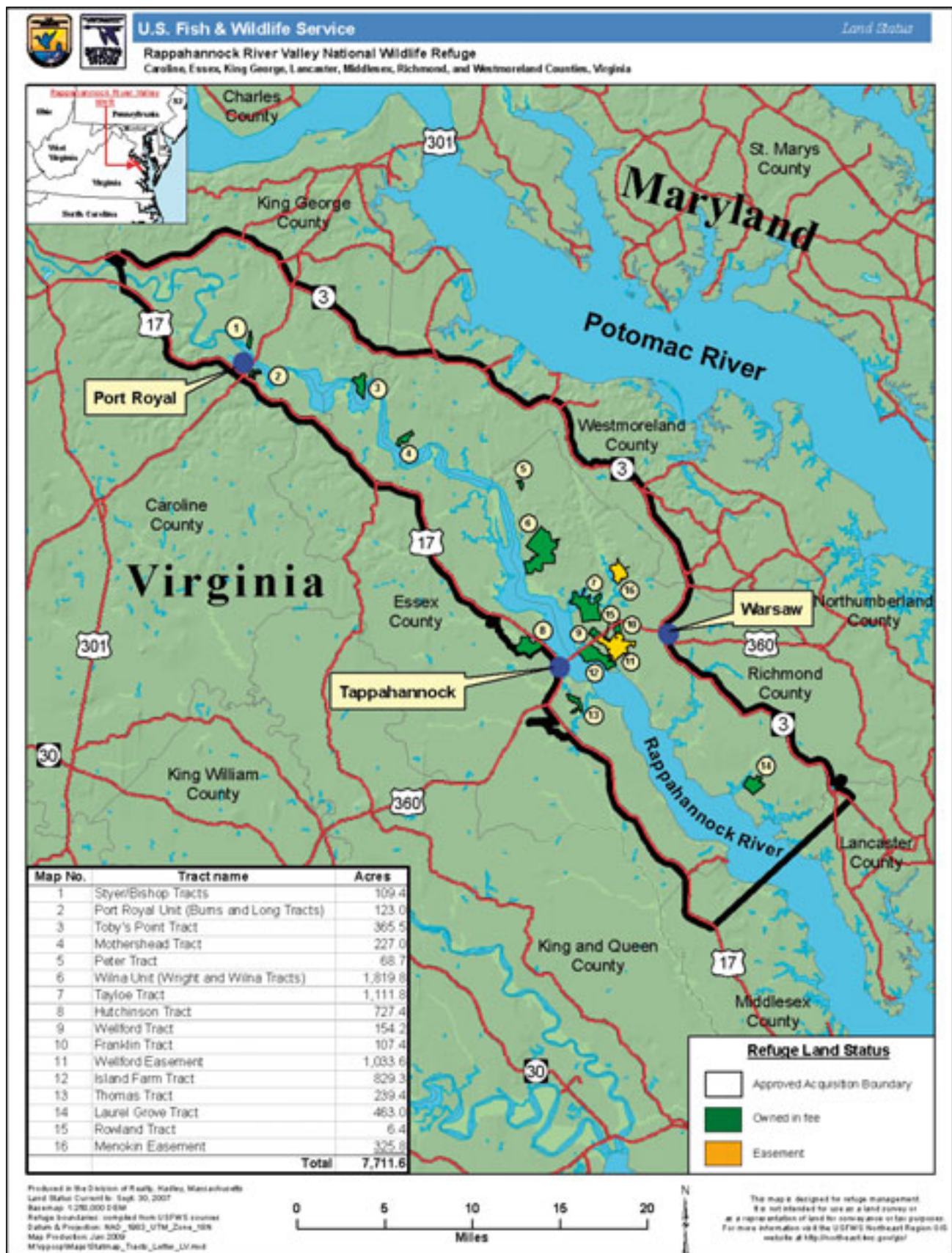
- defines our planning analysis area,
- presents the mission, policies and mandates affecting the development of the plan,
- identifies other conservation plans we used as references,
- lists the purposes for which the refuge was established and its land acquisition history, and
- clarifies the vision and goals that drive refuge management.

Chapter 2, "The Planning Process," describes the planning process we followed, including public and partner involvement in developing this final CCP. Chapter 2 also

- describes our compliance with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations, and
- identifies public issues or concerns that surfaced as we developed the plan.

Chapter 3, "The Existing Environment," describes the physical, biological, and human environments of the refuge.

Map 1.1. Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge and its Regional Setting





## The Purpose of and Need for the Proposed Action

Chapter 4, “Management Direction and Implementation,” presents the goals, objectives, strategies, and actions that will guide our decision-making and land management. It also outlines the and funding needed to accomplish that management.

Chapter 5, “Consultation and Coordination with Others,” summarizes how we involved the public and our partners in the planning process. Their involvement is vital for the future management of this refuge and all national wildlife refuges.

Eight appendixes, a glossary with acronyms, and a bibliography of literature cited provide additional documentation and references to support our narratives and analysis.

We developed a final CCP for the refuge that, in the Service’s best professional judgment, best achieves the purposes, vision, and goals of the refuge; contributes to the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System; adheres to Service policies and other mandates; addresses identified issues of significance; and, incorporates sound principles of fish and wildlife science.

The *purpose* of adopting a CCP for this refuge is to accomplish the following goals:

**Goal 1.** Contribute to the biological diversity of the mid-Atlantic region by protecting, enhancing, and restoring the refuge’s upland habitats, with an emphasis on breeding, migrating, and wintering birds.

**Goal 2.** Maintain the long-term biological integrity of riparian habitats along the Rappahannock River and its tributaries for bald eagles and other migratory birds.

**Goal 3.** Maintain and enhance the biological diversity and environmental health of tidal and non-tidal wetlands to benefit Federal listed species, waterfowl, other migratory birds, fish and shellfish, reptiles, and amphibians.

**Goal 4.** Promote enjoyment and stewardship of our Nation’s natural resources by providing high-quality, wildlife-dependent recreational and educational opportunities on refuge lands and waters.

**Goal 5.** Communicate and collaborate with local communities, Federal and state agencies, and conservation organizations throughout the lower Rappahannock River watershed to promote natural resource conservation and the mission of the Refuge System.

The *need* for a CCP on this refuge is manifold. First, the Improvement Act requires us to write CCPs for all national wildlife refuges by 2012 to help fulfill the mission of the Refuge System. Also, new Service policies providing specific guidance on implementing the Improvement Act have been developed since the refuge was established. A CCP incorporates those policies, and develops strategic management direction for the refuge for 15 years, by

- stating clearly the desired future conditions for refuge habitat, wildlife, visitor services, staffing, and facilities;
- explaining concisely to state agencies, refuge neighbors, visitors, partners, and other stakeholders the reasons for management actions;
- ensuring that refuge management conforms to the policies and goals of the Refuge System and is consistent with legal mandates;
- ensuring that present and future public uses are appropriate and compatible;

- providing long-term continuity and consistency in management direction; and,
- justifying budget requests for staffing, operating and maintenance funds.

In addition, other needs are manifest. This refuge lacks a master plan to implement that strategic management direction and guide our decisions. The environment of the refuge has changed considerably since 1996. Most notably, the refuge grew to its present size. The economy and patterns of land use and land ownership in local communities are changing. The pressures for public use and access have continued to increase. New ecosystem and species conservation plans have developed that bear directly on refuge management. The priority of habitat management and restoration to control invasive plants has grown. We also must evaluate our administrative and visitor facilities, including their locations, to ensure the best customer service possible. Finally, as responsible stewards of Federal lands, conveying our vision and priorities for the refuge to our partners, local communities, and interested and affected individuals is imperative.

### Regional Context

The regional context for this CCP is the Rappahannock River watershed (map 1.2). The Rappahannock River is part of the of the Chesapeake Bay/Susquehanna River ecosystem. The main stem of the Rappahannock River originates in Chester Gap, a mountainous region near Front Royal, Virginia, at an elevation of 1,350 feet. The Rapidan River joins it in the Piedmont, and they continue through the western side of the coastal plain before reaching the Chesapeake Bay. The entire journey is 185 miles from source to mouth. The watershed of the two rivers combined comprises about 2 million acres.

## The Service and the Refuge System: Policies and Mandates Guiding Planning

### The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and its Mission

As part of the Department of the Interior, the Service administers the Refuge System. The Service mission is “*Working with others, to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.*”



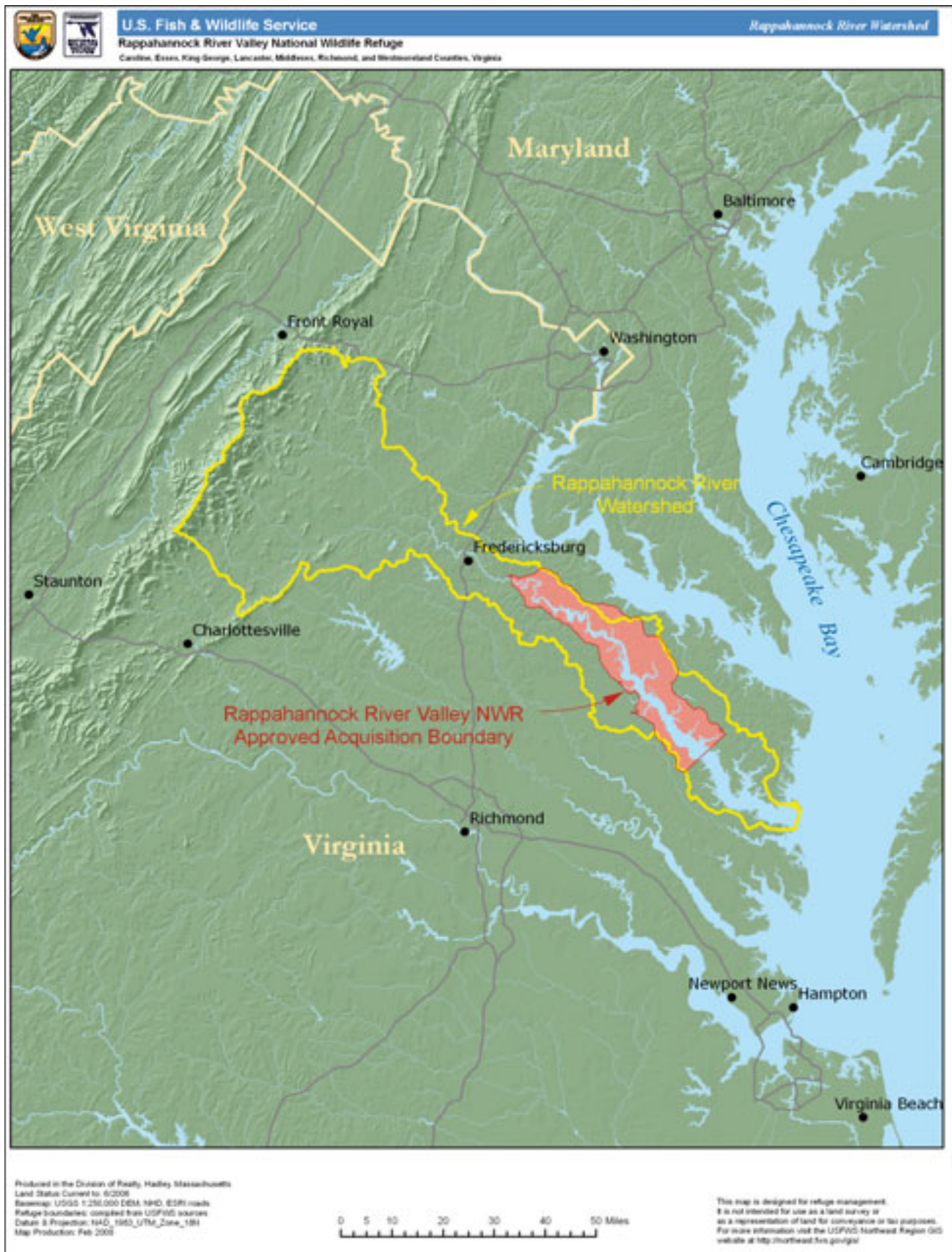
USFWS

Accessible fishing pier on the Hutchinson tract

Congress entrusts to the Service the conservation and protection of these national natural resources: migratory birds and fish, Federal-listed endangered or threatened species, inter-jurisdictional fish, wetlands, certain marine mammals, and national wildlife refuges. We also enforce Federal wildlife laws and international treaties on importing and exporting wildlife, assist states with their fish and wildlife programs, and help other countries develop conservation programs.

The Service Manual, <http://www.fws.gov/directives/direct.html>, contains the standing and continuing directives on implementing our authorities, responsibilities, and activities. We publish special directives that affect the rights of citizens or the authorities of other agencies separately in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR); the Service Manual does not duplicate them (see 50 CFR 1–99 at <http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/index.html>).

Map 1.2. Rappahannock River Watershed





## **The National Wildlife Refuge System and its Mission and Policies**

### **The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and its Mission**

The Refuge System is the world's largest collection of lands and waters set aside specifically for the conservation of wildlife and the protection of ecosystems. More than 550 national wildlife refuges encompass more than 150 million acres of lands and waters in all 50 states and several island territories. Each year, more than 40 million visitors hunt, fish, observe and photograph wildlife, or participate in environmental education and interpretation on refuges.

In 1997, President Clinton signed into law the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act. That Act establishes a unifying mission for the Refuge System and a new process for determining the compatibility of public uses on refuges, and requires us to prepare a CCP for each refuge. The act states that the Refuge System must focus on wildlife conservation. It also states that the mission of the Refuge System, coupled with the purpose(s) for which each refuge was established, will provide the principal management direction on that refuge. The mission of the Refuge System is

*“to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”*—National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act; Pub.L. 105–57

The Refuge Manual contains policy governing the operation and management of the Refuge System that the Fish and Wildlife Service Manual does not cover, including technical information on implementing refuge policies and guidelines on enforcing laws. You can review the Refuge Manual at refuge headquarters. These are a few noteworthy policies instrumental in developing this CCP. You may view them on the Web at <http://www.fws.gov/policy/manuals/part.cfm?series=600&seriestitle=LAND%20USE%20AND%20MANAGEMENT%20SERIES>. Highlights of some of these policies follow.

### **Policy on the National Wildlife Refuge System Mission, Goals and Purposes**

This policy (601 FW 1) sets forth the Refuge System mission noted above, how it relates to the Service mission, and explains the relationship of the Refuge System mission and goals, and the purpose(s) of each unit in the Refuge System. In addition, it identifies the following Refuge System goals.

- Conserve a diversity of fish, wildlife, and plants;
- Develop and maintain a network of habitats;
- Conserve those ecosystems, plant communities, and wetlands that are unique within the United States;
- Provide and enhance opportunities to participate in compatible, wildlife-dependent recreation; and,
- Help to foster public understanding and appreciation of the diversity of fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats.

This policy also establishes management priorities for the Refuge System.

- Conserve fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats;

## Policy on Refuge System Planning

- Facilitate compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses; and,
- Consider other appropriate and compatible uses.

This policy (602 FW 1, 2, 3) establishes the requirements and guidance for Refuge System planning, including CCPs and step-down management plans. It states that we will manage all refuges in accordance with an approved CCP that, when implemented, will help

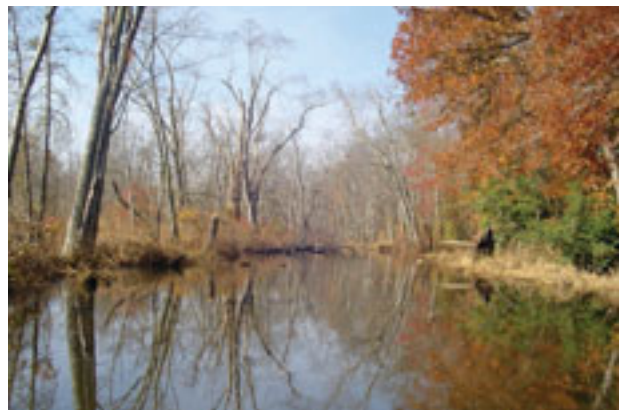
- achieve refuge purposes;
- fulfill the Refuge System mission;
- maintain and, where appropriate, restore the ecological integrity of each refuge and the Refuge System;
- achieve the goals of the National Wilderness Preservation System and the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System; and,
- conform to other applicable laws, mandates, and policies.

That planning policy provides step-by-step directions and identifies the minimum requirements for developing all CCPs. Among them, we are to review any existing special designation areas such as wilderness and wild and scenic rivers, specifically address the potential for any new special designations, conduct a wilderness review, and incorporate a summary of that review into each CCP (602 FW 3).

## Policy on the Appropriateness of Refuge Uses

Federal law and Service policy provide the direction and planning framework for protecting the Refuge System from inappropriate, incompatible or harmful human activities and ensuring that visitors can enjoy its lands and waters. This policy (603 FW 1) provides a national framework for determining appropriate refuge uses to prevent or eliminate those that should not occur in the Refuge System. It describes the initial decision process the refuge manager follows when first considering whether to allow a proposed use on a refuge. An appropriate use must meet at least one of the following four conditions.

- 1) The use is a wildlife-dependent recreational use as identified in the Improvement Act.
- 2) The use contributes to fulfilling the refuge purpose(s), the Refuge System mission, or goals or objectives described in a refuge management plan approved after October 9, 1997, the date the Improvement Act became law.
- 3) The use follows state regulations for the take of fish and wildlife.
- 4) The use has been found to be appropriate after concluding a specified findings process using 10 criteria.



*Fall on the refuge*

USFWS

You may view that policy on the Web at <http://www.fws.gov/policy/library/06-5645.pdf>.



### **Policy on Compatibility**

This policy (603 FW 2) complements the appropriateness policy. Once a refuge manager finds a use appropriate, they conduct a further evaluation through a compatibility determination assessment. The direction in 603 FW 2 provides guidelines for determining compatibility of uses and procedures for documentation and periodic review of existing uses. Highlights of the guidance in that chapter follows:

- The Refuge Improvement Act and its regulations require an affirmative finding by the refuge manager on the compatibility of a public use before we allow it on a national wildlife refuge.
- A compatible use is one “that will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the mission of the Refuge System or the purposes of the refuge.”
- The act defines six wildlife-dependent uses that are to receive enhanced consideration on refuges: “hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation.”
- The refuge manager may authorize those priority uses on a refuge when they are compatible and consistent with public safety.
- When the refuge manager publishes a compatibility determination, it will stipulate the required maximum reevaluation dates: 15 years for wildlife-dependent recreational uses; or, 10 years for other uses.
- However, the refuge manager may reevaluate the compatibility of a use at any time: for example, sooner than its mandatory date, or even before we complete the CCP process, if new information reveals unacceptable impacts or incompatibility with refuge purposes (603 FW 2.11, 2.12).
- The refuge manager may allow or deny any use, even one that is compatible, based on other considerations such as public safety, policy, or available funding.

### **Policy on Wildlife-dependent Public Uses**

This policy (605 FW 1) of the Service manual presents specific guidance on implementing a quality, wildlife-dependent recreation program. “Quality” is defined as a program that

- 1) promotes safety of participants, other visitors, and facilities;
- 2) promotes compliance with applicable laws and regulations and responsible behavior;
- 3) minimizes or eliminates conflict with fish and wildlife population or habitat goals or objectives in an approved plan;
- 4) minimizes or eliminates conflicts with other compatible wildlife-dependent recreation;
- 5) minimizes conflicts with neighboring landowners;
- 6) promotes accessibility and availability to a broad spectrum of the American people;
- 7) promotes resource stewardship and conservation;
- 8) promotes public understanding and increases public appreciation of America’s natural resources and our role in managing and conserving these resources;

- 9) provides reliable/reasonable opportunities to experience wildlife;
- 10) uses facilities that are accessible to people and blend into the natural setting;  
and
- 11) uses visitor satisfaction to help to define and evaluate programs.

### **Policy on Maintaining Biological Integrity, Diversity, and Environmental Health**

This policy (601 FW 3) provides guidance on maintaining or restoring the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the Refuge System, including the protection of a broad spectrum of fish, wildlife, and habitat resources in refuge ecosystems. It provides refuge managers with a process for evaluating the best management direction to prevent the additional degradation of environmental conditions and restore lost or severely degraded components of the environment. It also provides guidelines for dealing with external threats to the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of a refuge and its ecosystem.

### **Other Mandates**

Although Service and Refuge System policy and the purpose(s) of each refuge provide the foundation for its management, other Federal laws, executive orders, treaties, interstate compacts, and regulations on conserving and protecting natural and cultural resources also affect how we manage refuges. Our “Digest of Federal Resource Laws of Interest to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service” describes many of them at <http://www.fws.gov/laws/lawsdigest/index.html>.

Of particular note are the Federal laws that require the Service to identify and preserve its important historic structures, archaeological sites, and artifacts. NEPA mandates our consideration of cultural resources in planning Federal actions. The Improvement Act requires the CCP for each refuge to identify its archaeological and cultural values. Following is a highlight of some cultural and historic resource protection laws which relate to the development of CCPs.

- The Archaeological Resources Protection Act (16 U.S.C. 470aa–470ll; Pub.L. 96–95) approved October 31, 1979, (93 Stat. 721), referred to as ARPA, largely supplanted the resource protection provisions of the Antiquities Act of 1906 for archaeological items. ARPA establishes detailed requirements for issuance of permits for any excavation for or removal of archaeological resources from Federal or Native American lands. It also establishes civil and criminal penalties for the unauthorized excavation, removal, or damage of those resources; for any trafficking in those removed from Federal or Native American land in violation of any provision of Federal law; and for interstate and foreign commerce in such resources acquired, transported or received in violation of any state or local law.
- The Archeological and Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 469–469c; Pub.L. 86–523,) approved June 27, 1960, (74 Stat. 220) as amended by Pub.L. 93–291, approved May 24, 1974, (88 Stat. 174) carries out the policy established by the Historic Sites Act (see below). It directs Federal agencies to notify the Secretary of the Interior whenever they find that a Federal or Federally-assisted licensed or permitted project may cause the loss or destruction of significant scientific, prehistoric or archaeological data. The act authorizes the use of appropriated, donated or transferred funds for the recovery, protection and preservation of that data.
- The Historic Sites, Buildings and Antiquities Act (16 U.S.C. 461–462, 464–467; 49 Stat. 666) of August 21, 1935, popularly known as the Historic Sites Act, as amended by Pub.L. 89–249, approved October 9, 1965, (79 Stat. 971), declares it a national policy to preserve historic sites and objects of national significance, including those located on refuges. It provides procedures for designating, acquiring, administering and protecting them. Among other things, National Historic and Natural Landmarks are designated under the authority of this act.

- The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 470–470b, 470c–470n), Pub.L. 89–665, approved October 15, 1966 (80 Stat. 915) and repeatedly amended, provides for the preservation of significant historical features (buildings, objects and sites) through a grant-in-aid program to the states. It establishes a National Register of Historic Places and a program of matching grants under the existing National Trust for Historic Preservation (16 U.S.C. 468–468d). This act establishes an Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, which became a permanent, independent agency in Pub.L. 94–422, approved September 28, 1976 (90 Stat. 1319). The act created the Historic Preservation Fund. It directs Federal agencies to take into account the effects of their actions on items or sites listed or eligible for listing on the National Register.
- The Service also has a mandate to care for museum properties it owns in the public trust. The most common are archaeological, zoological, botanical collections, historical photographs, historic objects, and art. Each refuge maintains an inventory of its museum property. Our museum property coordinator in Hadley, Massachusetts, guides the refuges in caring for that property, and helps us comply with the Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act and Federal regulations governing Federal archaeological collections. Our program ensures that those collections will remain available to the public for learning and research.

Other Federal resource laws are also important to highlight as they are integral to developing a CCP. The Wilderness Act of 1964 (16 U.S.C. 1131–1136; Pub.L. 88–577) establishes a National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) that is composed of Federal-owned areas designated by Congress as “wilderness areas.” The act directs each agency administering designated wilderness to preserve the wilderness character of areas within the NWPS, and to administer the NWPS for the use and enjoyment of the American people in a way that will leave those areas unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness. The act also directs the Secretary of the Interior, within 10 years, to review every roadless area of 5,000 acres or more and every roadless island (regardless of size) within National Wildlife Refuge and National Park systems for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Service planning policy requires that we evaluate the potential for wilderness on refuge lands, as appropriate, during the CCP planning process.

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968, as amended, selects certain rivers of the nation possessing remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar values, preserves them in a free-flowing condition, and protects their local environments. Service planning policy requires that we evaluate the potential for wild and scenic rivers designation on refuge lands, as appropriate, during the CCP planning process.

Our mandates also include orders directed by the President, Secretary of Interior, and/or Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. We highlight three of those orders below.

- One of special importance to this document is Presidential Executive Order 13508—Chesapeake Bay Protection and Restoration (signed May 12, 2009). This order furthers the purpose of the Clean Water Act of 1972, as amended (33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq.), and other laws “...to protect and restore the health, heritage, natural resources, and social and economic value of the Nation’s largest estuarine ecosystem and the natural sustainability of its watershed.” It recognizes the Chesapeake Bay as “a national treasure constituting the largest estuary in the United States and one of the largest and most biologically productive estuaries in the world.”



It directs the establishment of a Federal Leadership Committee chaired by the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, or their designee, with participation by all Federal agencies with jurisdiction in the Bay. The Committee's purpose is to lead the effort to restore the health of the Chesapeake Bay under a renewed commitment to control pollution from all sources as well as protect and restore habitat and living resources, conserve lands, and improve management of natural resources, all of which contribute to improved water quality and ecosystem health.

This order also establishes the development of a strategy for coordinated implementation of existing programs and projects and development of an annual action plan and accomplishment reports. It also requires collaboration with state partners. The focus of the coordinated implementation plan will be to address: 1) water quality; 2) sources of pollution from agricultural lands and federal lands and facilities; 3) protecting the Bay's resources as the climate changes; 4) expanding opportunities for public access; 5) conserving landscapes and ecosystems; 6) the monitoring and accountability of activities.

- Presidential Executive Order 13443—Facilitation of Hunting Heritage and Wildlife Conservation was issued on August 16, 2007. The purpose of this order is to direct Federal agencies that have programs and activities affecting public land management, outdoor recreation, and wildlife management, including the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture, to facilitate the expansion and enhancement of hunting opportunities and the management of game species and their habitat. Federal agencies are directed to pursue certain activities listed in the Order, consistent with their missions. Those activities include managing wildlife and wildlife habitats on public lands in a manner that expands and enhances hunting opportunities, and working with state and tribal governments to manage wildlife and habitats to foster healthy and productive populations and provide appropriate opportunities for the public to hunt those species.
- Secretarial Order 3289—Addressing the Impacts of Climate Change on Americas Water, Land, and Other Natural and Cultural Resources, was issued on September 14, 2009. This order establishes a Department-wide, science-based approach to increasing our understanding of climate change and to coordinate an effective response to its impacts on tribes and on the land, water, ocean, fish and wildlife, and cultural heritage resources that the Department manages. The order establishes a “Climate Change Response Council” that will execute a coordinated Department-wide strategy to increase scientific understanding and the development of adaptive management tools to address the impact of climate change on our natural and cultural resources. The Council will help coordinate activities within and among federal agencies. Land management agencies are directed to pursue appropriate activities to reduce their carbon footprint, adapt water management strategies to address the possibility of a shrinking water supply, and protect and manage land in anticipation of sea level rise, shifting wildlife populations and habitats, increased wildland fire threats, and an increase in invasive and exotic species.

## **Conservation Plans and Initiatives Guiding the Proposed Action**

### **Birds of Conservation Concern 2008 Report**

The Service developed this report (USFWS 2008) as an update to their 2002 report in consultation with the leaders of ongoing bird conservation initiatives and such partnerships as Partners In Flight (PIF), the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) and Joint Ventures, the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan (NAWCP), and the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan. It

fulfills the mandate of the 1988 amendment to the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act of 1980 (100 Pub. L. 100–653, Title VIII), requiring the Secretary of the Interior, through the Service, to “identify species, subspecies, and populations of all migratory non-game birds that, without additional conservation actions, are likely to become candidates for listing under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.” The overall goal of this report is to accurately identify the migratory and non-migratory bird species (beyond those already designated as federally threatened or endangered) that represent our highest conservation priorities.

The geographic scope of this endeavor is the U.S. in its entirety, including island “territories” in the Pacific and Caribbean. The report encompasses three distinct geographic scales—the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs), the eight Service Regions, and National—and is primarily derived from assessment scores from three major bird conservation plans: the Partners in Flight North American Landbird Conservation Plan, the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, and the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan. Bird species included on lists in the report include non-game birds, gamebirds without hunting seasons, subsistence-hunted non-game birds in Alaska, and Endangered Species Act candidate, proposed endangered or threatened, and recently delisted species. Population trends, threats distribution, abundance and relative density were all factors considered.

This report is intended to stimulate coordinated and collaborative proactive conservation actions among Federal, state, tribal, and private partners. It is hoped that by focusing attention on these highest-priority species, this report will promote greater study and protection of the habitats and ecological communities upon which these species depend, thereby contributing to healthy avian populations and communities. You may view the report at: <http://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/reports/BCC2008/BCC2008m.pdf>. This is one of the plans we used in identifying species of concern in appendix A, and in developing management objectives and strategies in goals 1, 2, and 3.

**North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP; update 2004) and Atlantic Coast Joint Venture Implementation Plan (ACJV 2005)**

Originally written in 1986, NAWMP describes a 15-year strategy promulgated by the United States, Canada, and Mexico to restore and sustain waterfowl populations by protecting, restoring and enhancing habitat. The plan committee, including representatives from each nation, has modified the 1986 plan twice to account for biological, sociological, and economic changes that influenced the status of waterfowl and the conduct of cooperative habitat conservation. The most recent modification, in 2004, (NAWMP 2004) updates the needs, priorities, and strategies for the next 15 years, increases stakeholder confidence in the direction of its actions, and guides partners in strengthening the biological foundation of North American waterfowl conservation. You may review the plan at <http://www.fws.gov/birdhabitat/NAWMP>.

To convey goals, priorities, and strategies more effectively, NAWMP 2004 is comprised of two separate documents: Strategic Guidance and Implementation Framework, the former for agency administrators and policy makers who set the direction and priorities for conservation. The latter includes supporting technical information for use by biologists and land managers.

The plans are implemented at the regional level in 14 habitat Joint Ventures and 3 species Joint Ventures: Arctic goose, black duck, and sea duck. Our project area lies in the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture (ACJV), which includes all the Atlantic Flyway states from Maine to Florida and Puerto Rico. The waterfowl goal for the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture is “Protect and manage priority wetland habitats for migration, wintering, and production of waterfowl, with special consideration to black ducks, and to benefit other wildlife in the joint venture area.”

In 2005, a revision of the original ACJV Implementation Plan (ACJV 2005) was completed. The ACJV 2005 plan presents habitat conservation goals and population indices for the ACJV consistent with the NAWMP update, provides status assessments of waterfowl and their habitats in the joint venture, and updates focus area narratives and maps for each state. That document is intended as a blueprint for conserving the valuable breeding, migration and wintering waterfowl habitat present within the ACJV boundary based on the best available information and the expert opinion of waterfowl biologists from throughout the flyway. You may review the ACJV 2005 at [http://www.acjv.org/acjv\\_publications.htm](http://www.acjv.org/acjv_publications.htm).

The Black Duck Joint Venture plan also relates to our project area. Black ducks use the refuge year-round, and are most plentiful during fall migration and winter. The Black Duck Joint Venture Plan, Final Draft Strategic Plan (USFWS/CWS 1993) can be viewed at <http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bdjv/>.

We used these plans in identifying species of concern in appendix A, and in developing management objectives and strategies under goals 1, 2, and 3.

### **New England/Mid-Atlantic Bird Conservation Region (BCR 30) Implementation Plan (2007)**

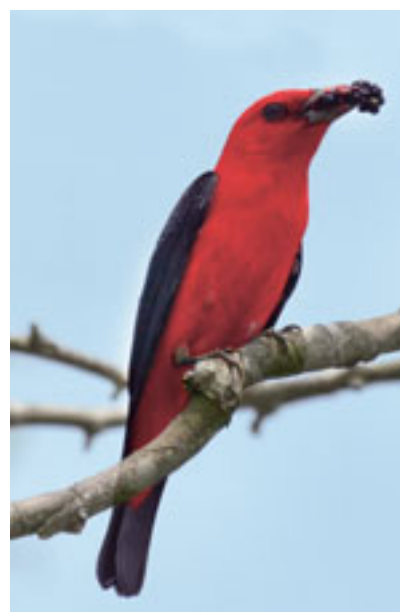
The refuge lies in the New England/Mid-Atlantic BCR 30, which lists birds of high conservation priority for the region. BCR 30 provides important resources for migratory birds whose ranges span the western hemisphere. The habitats associated with coastal ecosystems provide the highest habitat values and critical staging areas for migratory waterfowl, waterbirds, shorebirds, and landbirds. Forested upland communities, are the second most important habitats for migratory birds in the BCR. The Chesapeake Bay and Delaware Bay, as well as other major bays in the BCR, provide crucial resources for many migrating birds as they journey from their breeding sites in the north to non-breeding sites in Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean and South America.

Unfortunately, most of the lands in BCR 30 have been altered from their historic condition. Urban development and agriculture dominates much of the landscape. The loss or degradation of habitat (e.g., by fragmentation, agriculture, and invasive species) are the greatest threats to bird populations in BCR 30. This plan identifies the bird species and habitats in greatest need of conservation action in this region, activities thought to be most useful to address those needs, and geographic areas believed to be the most important places for those activities. This plan is meant to start a regional bird conservation initiative of partners across BCR 30 communicating their conservation planning and implementation activities to deliver high-priority conservation actions in a coordinated manner. You may view the BCR 30 implementation plan at [http://www.acjv.org/bcr30\\_draft.htm](http://www.acjv.org/bcr30_draft.htm).

We used this plan in identifying species of concern in appendix A, and in developing management objectives and strategies under goals 1, 2, and 3.

### **North American Waterbird Conservation Plan (Version 1, 2002)**

This plan (Kushlan et al., 2002) is an independent partnership among individuals and institutions with the interest in and responsibility for conserving water birds and their habitats. The plan is just one element of a multi-faceted conservation program.



*Scarlet tanager*

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Its primary goal is to ensure that the distribution, diversity, and abundance of populations and habitats of breeding, migratory, and non-breeding water birds are sustained or restored throughout the lands and waters of North America, Central America, and the Caribbean. It provides a framework for conserving and managing colonially nesting water-dependent birds. In addition, it will facilitate continent-wide planning and monitoring, national, state, and provincial conservation, regional coordination, and local habitat protection and management. You may access the plan at <http://www.nawcp.org/pubs/ContinentalPlan.cfm>.

In 2006, the Mid-Atlantic New England Working Group developed the Waterbird Conservation Plan for the Mid-Atlantic/New England/Maritimes (MANEM) Region (MANEM Waterbird Working Group 2006). This plan is being implemented between 2006 and 2010. It consists of technical appendixes on (1) waterbird populations including occurrence, status, and conservation needs, (2) waterbird habitats and locations within the region that are crucial for waterbird sustainability, (3) MANEM partners and regional expertise for waterbird conservation, and (4) conservation project descriptions that present current and proposed research, management, habitat acquisition, and education activities. Summarized information on waterbirds and their habitats provides a regional perspective for local conservation action. You may access the plan at <http://www.fws.gov/birds/waterbirds/manem/index.html>.

We used this plan in identifying species of concern in appendix A, and in developing management objectives and strategies under goals 1, 2, and 3.

#### **U.S. Shorebird (2001, 2nd Edition) and North Atlantic Regional Shorebird Plans**

Concerns about shorebirds led to the creation of the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan in 2000. A second edition was published in May 2001 (Brown et al. 2001). Developed in a partnership with individuals and organizations throughout the United States, the plan presents conservation goals for each U.S. region, identifies important habitat conservation and research needs, and proposes education and outreach programs to increase public awareness of shorebirds and of threats to them. You may read the plan at <http://www.fws.gov/shorebirdplan/USShorebird/downloads/USShorebirdPlan2Ed.pdf>.

In the Northeast, the North Atlantic Regional Shorebird Plan (Clark & Niles, North Atlantic Shorebird Habitat Working Group 2000) was drafted to step down the goals of the continental plan to smaller scales to identify priority species, habitat and species goals, and implementation projects. You may view the North Atlantic Regional Shorebird Plan at <http://www.fws.gov/shorebirdplan/RegionalShorebird/RegionalPlans.htm>.

We used this plan in identifying species of concern in appendix A, and in developing management objectives and strategies under goals 1, 2, and 3.

#### **National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines (May 2007) and Virginia Bald Eagle Guidelines**

In July 2007, the Service issued a final ruling to remove the bald eagle from the Federal list of endangered and threatened species. The bald eagle remains under the protection of the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (Eagle Act) and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). The Service developed National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines to advise landowners, land managers, and others who share public and private lands with bald eagles when and under what circumstances the protective provisions of the Eagle Act may apply to their activities. The guidelines help minimize impacts on bald eagles, particularly where people may constitute a “disturbance,” which the Eagle Act prohibits. The guidelines (1) publicize the provisions of the Eagle Act that continue to protect bald eagles, to reduce the possibility that people will violate the law, (2) advise landowners, land managers and the public of the potential for various human activities to disturb bald eagles, and (3) encourage additional, nonbinding land management practices that benefit bald eagles. We intended the guidelines primarily as a tool for landowners and planners who seek information and recommendations on how to avoid disturbing bald eagles. You

may view the guidelines at <http://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/issues/BaldEagle/NationalBaldEagleManagementGuidelines.pdf>.

Because of the delisting, the specific guidelines for Virginia's bald eagles, prepared by our Virginia Field Office and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF), are being revised. The bald eagle remains a state threatened species in Virginia, and because of the importance of the Chesapeake Bay region for the entire Atlantic population of eagles, we will consider state guidelines regarding time-of-year restrictions and distance requirements from nests and concentration areas, even if they are more stringent than the national guidelines. We referred to those guidelines as we developed our management objectives and strategies for bald eagles.

## Partners In Flight Bird Conservation Plans

In 1990, Partners In Flight (PIF) began as a voluntary, international coalition of government agencies, conservation organizations, academic institutions, private industries, and citizens dedicated to reversing the population declines of bird species and "keeping common birds common." The foundation of PIF's long-term strategy is a series of scientifically based bird conservation plans using physiographic areas as planning units.

The goal of each PIF plan is to ensure the long-term maintenance of healthy populations of native birds, primarily non-game birds. The plan for each physiographic area ranks bird species according to their conservation priority, describes their desired habitat conditions, develops biological objectives, and recommends conservation measures. The priority ranking factors in habitat loss, population trends, and the vulnerability of a species and its habitats to regional and local threats.

Physiographic Area 44—Mid-Atlantic Coastal Plain (April 1999).—Our project area lies in Physiographic Area 44, the Mid-Atlantic Coastal Region. We referred to this plan in developing our list of species of conservation concern in appendix A, as well as our habitat objectives and strategies under goals 1, 2, and 3. This plan can be accessed at [http://www.blm.gov/wildlife/plan/pl\\_44\\_10.pdf](http://www.blm.gov/wildlife/plan/pl_44_10.pdf).

## Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, National State Agency Herpetological Conservation Report (Draft 2004)

Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (PARC) was created in response to the increasing, well-documented national declines in amphibian and reptile populations. Many consider it the most comprehensive effort in herpetofaunal conservation. PARC members come from state and Federal agencies, conservation organizations, museums, the pet trade industry, nature centers, zoos, the power industry, universities, herpetological organizations, research laboratories, forest industries and environmental consultants. Its five geographic regions—Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Southwest and Northwest—can focus on national and regional challenges in herpetofaunal conservation. Regional working groups allow for region-specific communication. The Northeast working group has developed "Model State Herpetofauna Regulatory Guidelines" which informs us on specific habitat management prescriptions for the benefit of different taxonomic groups of herpetofauna. We consulted these guidelines as we developed our strategy; this document can be found at (<http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/neparc/products/modelherpregs.htm>)

The National State Agency Herpetological Conservation Report (NHCR) is a summary report (PARC 2004) sponsored by PARC that provides a general overview of each state wildlife agency's support for reptile and amphibian conservation and

Northern water snake



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research through September 2004. It lists amphibian and reptile species of concern for each state. Each state report was compiled in cooperation with its agency's lead biologist on herpetofaunal conservation. That report can be accessed at <http://www.parcplace.org/documents/PARCNationalStates2004.pdf>. Its purpose is to facilitate communication among state agencies and partner organizations throughout the PARC network to identify and address regional and national herpetological priorities.

PARC intends to expand the scope of the NHCR to include other states, provinces, and territories. It will include other state agencies that are supporting herpetofaunal conservation and research, such as transportation departments, park departments, and forest agencies. The next NHCR report will integrate a list of the Species of Conservation Concern into each state's comprehensive conservation wildlife strategy (see below).

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife  
Service Fisheries Program,  
Northeast Region  
Strategic Plan 2009–2013  
(January 2009)**

The Service's Fisheries Program (Program) primary mission is to work with others to maintain self-sustaining, healthy populations of coastal and anadromous fish (fish that spend part of their lives in fresh water and part in the ocean), fish species that cross state or national boundaries, and endangered aquatic animals and their habitats. In the Northeast Region, 25 fishery management offices and national fish hatcheries work with states and other partners to restore and protect a variety of fish and other aquatic species. Examples include Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*), striped bass (*Morone saxatilis*), American shad (*Alosa sapidissima*), river herring (*Alosa pseudoharengus*, *Alosa aestivalis*), sturgeon (*Acipenser oxyrinchus oxyrinchus*), horseshoe crab (*Limulus polyphemus*), American eel (*Anguilla rostrata*), and menhaden (*Brevoortia tyrannus*).

The Program has played a vital role in conserving and managing fish and other aquatic resources since 1871. Today, the Program is a critical partner with states, Tribes, other governments, other Service programs, private organizations, public institutions, and interested citizens in a larger effort to conserve these important resources. In 2002, working with its many partners in aquatic conservation through the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council's Fisheries Steering Committee, the Service completed its Strategic Vision (Vision) document: "Conserving America's Fisheries, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fisheries Program Vision for the Future." That vision document includes goals, objectives, and action items on a national programmatic scale.

The Program is committed to working with partners to

- Protect the health of aquatic habitats;
- Restore fish and other aquatic resources; and
- Provide opportunities to enjoy the many benefits of healthy aquatic resources.

The Regional Fisheries Program Strategic Plan (plan) is an extension of the vision, describing more specifically the tactics to be implemented by the Northeast Region to fulfill the goals and objectives identified in the vision. The first plan covered years 2004 to 2008. The current plan (2009–2013) can be viewed at <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/fisheries/reports/reports/FisheriesStrategicPlan.pdf>

This plan brings together changing national direction, institutional knowledge, analysis of spatial information, and the perspectives of our state and tribal partners to develop a strategic plan that allows this regional program to prioritize its efforts during challenging times, while promoting positive change into the future. As the plan is implemented it will we build on a strong foundation of active partnerships and past accomplishments, while recognizing that continued communication, cooperation and expansion of partnerships is essential for successful implementation of this plan and fulfillment of the Program's resource



responsibilities and obligations. This plan was built off the lessons learned from implementing the 2004–2008 strategic plan, which was very broad.

One step-down effort resulting from the plan is the identification and ranking of fish and other aquatic species as to their level of conservation concern by hydrologic unit. We used this ranking and have consulted with the Regional Fisheries Program staff in developing aquatic objectives and strategies under goal 3, and in creating appendix A, “Species and Habitats of Conservation Concern on the Refuge and Other Refuge Species Lists.”

### **Virginia Wildlife Action Plan (October 2005)**

In 2002, Congress created the State Wildlife Grant Program (SWG), and appropriated \$80 million in state grants. The purpose of the program is to help state and tribal fish and wildlife agencies conserve fish and wildlife species of greatest conservation need. The funds appropriated under the program are allocated to each state according to a formula that takes into account its size and population.

To be eligible for additional Federal grants, and to satisfy the requirements for participating in the SWG program, each state and U.S. territory was charged with developing a statewide “Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy” and submitting it to the National Advisory Acceptance Team by October 1, 2005. Each plan must address eight required elements, and each plan is to identify and focus on “species of greatest conservation need,” yet address the “full array of wildlife” and wildlife-related issues, and “keep common species common.”

The Virginia plan (VDGIF 2005), commonly referred to as the Virginia Wildlife Action Plan (VA WAP) resulted from that charge. It creates a vision for conserving Virginia’s wildlife and stimulates other states, Federal agencies, and conservation partners to think strategically about their individual and coordinated roles in prioritizing conservation.

In addressing the eight elements below, the VA WAP helps supplement the information we gathered on species and habitat occurrences and their distribution in our area analysis, and helps us identify conservation threats and management strategies for species and habitats of conservation concern in the CCP. The expertise convened to compile this plan and its partner and public involvement further enhance its benefits for us. We used the VA WAP in developing our list of species of concern in appendix A, and the management objectives and strategies for goals 1, 2, and 3. These are its eight elements:

- 1) information on the distribution and abundance of species of wildlife, including low and declining populations as the state fish and wildlife agency deems appropriate, that are indicative of the diversity and health of the state’s wildlife;
- 2) descriptions of locations and relative condition of key habitats and community types essential to the conservation of species identified in element 1;
- 3) descriptions of problems that may adversely affect species identified in element 1 or their habitats, and priority research and survey efforts needed to identify factors which may assist in restoration and improved conservation of these species and habitats;
- 4) descriptions of conservation actions necessary to conserve the identified species and habitats and priorities for implementing such actions;
- 5) plans proposed for monitoring species identified in element 1 and their habitats, for monitoring the effectiveness of the conservation actions proposed in element 4, and for adapting those conservation actions to respond appropriately to new information or changing conditions;

- 6) description of procedures to review the plan at intervals not to exceed 10 years;
- 7) plans for coordinating, to the extent feasible, the development, implementation, review, and revision of the plan strategy with Federal, state, and local agencies and Native American tribes that manage significant areas of land and water within the state, or administer programs that significantly affect the conservation of identified species and habitats; and,
- 8) plans for involving the public in the development and implementation of plan strategies.

The State of Virginia completed its final WAP, with no changes from its draft, in October 2005. You may view it at <http://www.vawildlifestrategies.org/draft.html>.

#### Other Information Sources

We also consulted the plans and resources below as we refined our management objectives and strategies, especially those with a local context.

#### Continental or National Plans

- Recreational Fishery Resources Conservation Plan; available at <https://www.denix.osd.mil/denix/Public/ES-Programs/Conservation/Fishery/fishery.html>
- National Wetlands Research Center Strategic Plan; available at <http://www.nwrc.usgs.gov/about/5-year-plan.htm>
- National Audubon Society Watchlist; available at <http://web1.audubon.org/science/species/watchlist/>

#### Regional Plans

- CHESAPEAKE 2000: A Watershed Partnership; available at: <http://www.chesapeakebay.net/pubs/agree99.PDF>
- Ducks Unlimited Conservation Plan; available at <http://www.ducks.org/Conservation/ConservationPlan/1516/InternationalConservationPlan.html>
- The Chesapeake Rivers Site Conservation Plan (TNC) ; available at: [http://conserveonline.org/coldocs/2001/08/chesriv\\_plan.zip?searchterm=chesriv\\_plan](http://conserveonline.org/coldocs/2001/08/chesriv_plan.zip?searchterm=chesriv_plan)
- Chesapeake Bay Lowlands Ecoregional Plan (TNC) ; available at <http://conserveonline.org/docs/2005/03/CBYplan.pdf>
- Partners for Wildlife Strategic Plan; available at: <http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/partners/web/pdf/783.pdf>

#### State Plans

- Business Plan for Environmental Education; available at <http://www.vanaturally.com/pdf/busplan.pdf>
- VA Outdoors Plan and/or Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans (SCORP); available at [http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational\\_planning/vop.sht](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational_planning/vop.sht)

#### Local Plans

- Northern Neck PDC: Cat Point Creek Watershed Management Plan 2004; available at [http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/soil\\_&\\_water/documents/02-CatPointCreekWMP-2004.pdf](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/soil_&_water/documents/02-CatPointCreekWMP-2004.pdf)

#### Individual Species Plans

- Atlantic Flyway Mute Swan Management Plan; available at <http://www.mdwfa.org/flyway/muteswanchesapeakebaymanagementplan.pdf>
- American Woodcock Management Plan; available at <http://permanent.access.gpo.gov/lps2111/nativefiles/harvest/wdckrept.html>
- Black Duck Joint Venture; available at <http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bdjb/bdjbvstpl.htm>

- King Rail Conservation Plan; available at [http://www.fws.gov/midwest/MidwestBird/FocalSpecies/documents/Draft\\_King\\_Rail\\_Conservation\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.fws.gov/midwest/MidwestBird/FocalSpecies/documents/Draft_King_Rail_Conservation_Plan.pdf)
- Northern bobwhite conservation initiative; available at <http://www.bobwhiteconservation.org/>
- Sensitive Joint-Vetch Recovery Plan; available at [http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/recovery\\_plans/1995/950929b.pdf](http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/recovery_plans/1995/950929b.pdf)
- American Shad and River Herring Fisheries Management Plan (spawning/nurseries); available at <http://www.asmf.org/speciesDocuments/shad/fmps/1985FMP.pdf>
- Final Recovery Plan for the Shortnose Sturgeon; available at [http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/pdfs/recovery/sturgeon\\_shortnose.pdf](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/pdfs/recovery/sturgeon_shortnose.pdf)
- Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Sturgeon and its amendments and addendums; available at <http://www.asmf.org/speciesDocuments/sturgeon/fmps/fmps/sturgeonFMP.pdf>
- American Eel Fisheries Management Plan and addendum; available at <http://www.asmf.org/speciesDocuments/eel/fmps/eelFMP.pdf>
- Management Plan for the Atlantic Population of Canada Geese; available at [http://www.mdwfa.org/flyway/CAGO\\_APMgmtPlanMarch2008.pdf](http://www.mdwfa.org/flyway/CAGO_APMgmtPlanMarch2008.pdf)
- Management Plan for the Eastern population of Tundra Swans; available at <http://www.mdwfa.org/flyway/FinalEPTUSWPlanJuly-07.pdf>
- Small-Whorled Pagonia Recovery Plan; available at [http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/recovery\\_plans/1992/921113b.pdf](http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/recovery_plans/1992/921113b.pdf)

## Refuge Establishing Purposes and Land Acquisition History

The refuge was established in 1996 for the following purposes and under the following authorities.

*“for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources...” 16 U.S.C. §742f(a)(4), and*

*“for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, in performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude...” 16 U.S.C. §742f(b)(1) (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956), and*

*“the conservation of the wetlands of the Nation in order to maintain the public benefits they provide and to help fulfill international obligations contained in various migratory bird treaties and conventions ...” 16 U.S.C. §3901(b), 100 Stat. 3583 (Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986), and*

*“to conserve (A) fish or wildlife which are listed as endangered species or threatened species...or (B) plants...” 16 U.S.C. §1534 (Endangered Species Act of 1973), and*

*“for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds...” 16 U.S.C. §715d (Migratory Bird Conservation Act).*

Map 1.1 above depicts the refuge ownership boundary as of September 30, 2007. Table 1.1 below summarizes the land acquisition history of the refuge by year.



**Table 1.1. History of land acquisition at the Rappahannock River Valley refuge through September 30, 2007**

Acquisition Date	Acreage	Funding Source
1996	1112	Donation
1998	41	LWCF <sup>2</sup>
1999	2651	LWCF; Donation
2000	166	LWCF; MBCF <sup>3</sup>
2001	860	LWCF
2003	686	LWCF
2004	1015	MBCF; LWCF
2005	1180	LWCF
2006	0	
2007	0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,711<sup>1</sup></b>	

<sup>1</sup>The Service owns 6,352 acres in fee and 1,359 in conservation easement. Those acres are rounded to whole numbers; contact the refuge headquarters for precise acreages.

<sup>2</sup>LWCF—Land and Water Conservation Fund.—funding sources include revenues from the sale of surplus Federal real property, motorboat fuel taxes, fees for recreation on Federal lands, and receipts from mineral leases on the outer continental shelf.

<sup>3</sup>MBCF—Migratory Bird Conservation Fund.—the funding source is receipts from the sale of Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamps.

## Refuge Administration

We administer the Rappahannock River Valley refuge as part of the Eastern Virginia Rivers NWR Complex, which also includes the James River, Plum Tree Island, and Presquile refuges. The refuge complex headquarters is located in Warsaw, Virginia.

This refuge complex now has seven permanent staff: a refuge manager, deputy refuge manager, refuge wildlife biologist, administrative assistant, a visitor services specialist, refuge law enforcement officer, and one maintenance worker. Seasonal staff positions will vary between one and five each year. Six of the employees are stationed in Warsaw; one is stationed in Charles City, Virginia. The position at the Charles City sub-office assists in visitor services for the entire refuge complex, and manages the day-to-day operations at the James River, Plum Tree Island, and Presquile refuges.

## Refuge Operational Plans ("Step-down" Plans)

Refuge planning policy lists more than 25 step-down management plans that may be required on refuges. Those plans contain specific strategies and implementation schedules for achieving refuge goals and objectives. Some plans require annual revisions; others require revision every 5 to 10 years. Some require additional NEPA analysis, public involvement, and compatibility determinations before we can implement them.

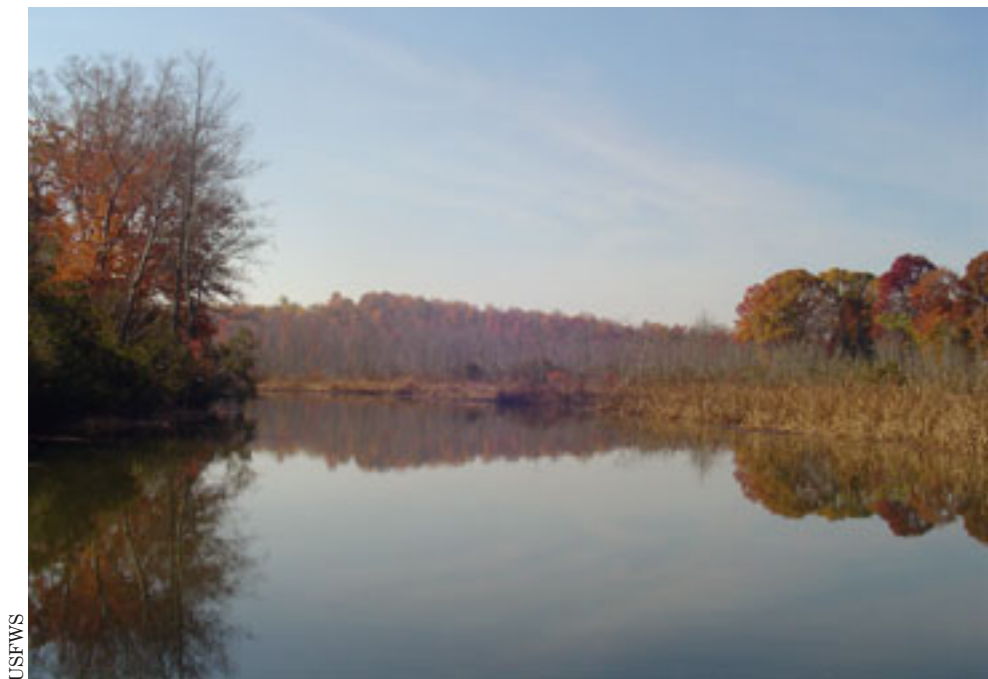
The status of step-down plans on the refuge follows. This plan incorporates by reference those that are up-to-date. Chapter 3 provides more information about the additional step-down plans needed and their schedule for completion.

The refuge now has the following seven step-down plans in place. We will update them as warranted for consistency with the final CCP.

- Fire Management—updated in 2009
- Public Deer Hunting—completed 2002
- Public Fishing—completed 2003
- Environmental Education—completed 2004
- Avian Influenza Contingency Plan—completed 2007
- Hurricane Action Plan—completed 2007
- Chronic Wasting Disease Plan—completed 2008

We plan to complete the following step-down plans (also see chapter 3).

- Habitat Management Plan (HMP; highest priority step-down plan, to be completed within 1 year of CCP approval)
- Annual Habitat Work Plan (AHWP) (to be completed annually after HMP approval)
- Safety Plan (to be completed within 1 year of CCP approval)
- Integrated Pest Management Plan (IPM; to be completed within 2 years of CCP approval)
- Inventory and Monitoring Plan (IMP; to be completed within 2 years of CCP approval)
- Visitor Services Plan (to be completed within 5 years of CCP approval)
- Law Enforcement Plan (to be completed within 5 years of CCP approval)



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*Mt. Landing Creek*

## Refuge Vision Statement

Our planning team developed this vision statement to provide a guiding philosophy and sense of purpose in the CCP.

*“On the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge, birds will raise their young in native habitats of field, forest, and marsh. They will find rest and nourishment during migration and a haven in winter. We will manage refuge lands and waters with an emphasis on species whose populations have declined, assisting them on the road to recovery.*

*“In partnership with others, we will contribute to the communities where we exist, helping renew the health and vitality of the Rappahannock River and the Chesapeake Bay. We will complement the rich traditions of hunting, fishing, forestry and agriculture on Virginia’s Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula.*

*“The refuge will serve as an outdoor classroom, where students of all ages will study nature’s complexity, contributing to our understanding and appreciation of the natural world and the National Wildlife Refuge System. All those who visit will find enjoyment in the presence of healthy and abundant fish, wildlife, and plants, and will leave with a renewed personal commitment to land conservation and stewardship.”*

## Refuge Goals

We developed these goals after considering the vision statement, the purposes for establishing the refuge, the missions of the Service and the Refuge System, and the mandates, plans, and conservation initiatives above. These goals are intentionally broad, descriptive statements of purpose. They highlight elements of the vision for the refuge that we will emphasize in its future management. The biological goals take precedence; but otherwise, we do not present them in any particular order. In Chapter 4, we describe the relationship between the goals, objectives, and strategies that we have developed.

**Goal 1.** Contribute to the biological diversity of the mid-Atlantic region by protecting, enhancing, and restoring the refuge’s upland habitats, with an emphasis on breeding, migrating, and wintering birds.

**Goal 2.** Maintain the long-term biological integrity of riparian habitats along the Rappahannock River and its tributaries for bald eagles and other migratory birds.

**Goal 3.** Maintain and enhance the biological diversity and environmental health of tidal and non-tidal wetlands to benefit Federal listed species, waterfowl, other migratory birds, fish and shellfish, reptiles, and amphibians.

**Goal 4.** Promote enjoyment and stewardship of our Nation’s natural resources by providing high-quality, wildlife-dependent recreational and educational opportunities on refuge lands and waters.

**Goal 5.** Communicate and collaborate with local communities, Federal and state agencies, and conservation organizations throughout the lower Rappahannock River watershed to promote natural resource conservation and the mission of the Refuge System.